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GENERAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS

Note verbale dated 2 February 1995 from the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations addressed to the secretariat of the World Summit for Social Development

The Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations presents its compliments to the secretariat of the World Summit for Social Development and, on behalf of the secretariat of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), has the honour to submit a "Report of the SAARC Workshop to Formulate a Collective Position for the World Summit for Social Development" held in New Delhi, 12-13 December 1994, with a request to circulate this as a Summit document.

* A/CONF.166/1.

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ANNEX

Report of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Workshop to Formulate a Collective Position for the World Summit for Social Development (12-13 December 1994) *

* Circulated in the language of submission.

REPORT OF THE SAARC WORKSHOP TO FORMULATE A COLLECTIVE POSITION FOR THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT (NEW DELHI, 12-13 DECEMBER, 1994)

In pursuance of the Declaration of the Heads of State or Government during the Seventh SAARC Summit held in Dhaka on 11 April, 1993 and the offer made by the Government of India during the Thirteenth Session of the Council of Ministers in Dhaka on 4-5 December, 1993, a Workshop was held in New Delhi on 12 and 13 December 1994 to formulate a collective position by the Member States of SAARC for presentation in the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in March 1995. The Workshop was attended by representatives of all the seven Member States.

2. The Workshop was inaugurated by Shri K.R. Venugopal, Secretary, Prime Minister's Office, Prof. S.R. Hashim, Principal Advisor, Planning Commission of India was unanimously elected as the chairman of the Meeting.

3. The Meeting addressed key social development issues in the SAARC Region and identified the basic elements of a common SAARC approach to the issues to be raised at the World Summit for Social Development. The Summit would provide an ideal opportunity for re-examination of the approaches and issues. It could strengthen the development and implementation of an innovative and result-oriented participatory paradigm of social development.

PREAMBLE

4. The participants of the Member States of SAARC recalling and reaffirming the goals and recommendations of

SAARC Summits, ministerial and other meetings pertaining to issues before the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development and :

- Noting that approximately one third of the population of the SAARC Countries lives in poverty; that nearly half of that population goes hungry; millions of persons are unemployed and underemployed; a large number of the peoples of South Asia do not have access to safe drinking water; that illiteracy is widespread and malnutrition and disease continue to stalk most of the Region; that Women, who constitute half of the Region's population, are subject to varying degrees of discrimination;

- Realizing that an accelerated pace of poverty eradication is a pre-condition for development;

- Noting that in recent times, increased levels of crime, violence, social exclusion, discrimination and consequent despair have brought the social fabric of our societies under unacceptable strains;

- Recognizing the responsibility of the Member States to make this Region a better place for its people;

- Reaffirming the resolute determination of the Member States to usher in a new order that would

make deprivation of all kinds - human, social and economic - a memory of the past, within the shortest possible time;

- The Member States make this affirmation here in New Delhi, because it is eminently possible of achievement, given the Member States' commitment to the highest ideals of an equitable world order that is the right of every citizen in the SAARC Region.

- In this endeavour, the Member States shall keep the people at the centre of their combined efforts, with a commitment to uphold their dignity in terms of all the fundamental rights to which citizens are entitled in all free societies, such as freedom of expression, association, right to life and the right to vote, while further enhancing human dignity and achievement so as to include rights such as those to food, to work, to education, to health, to shelter, to information, justice and transparency of governance; such governance based always on full participative processes, empowering the people and accommodating diversity, with equal rights and responsibility for women and those other sections of society that may have been historically disadvantaged.

ERADICATION OF POVERTY

5. The Member States noted their long and varied experiences representing the highest ideals of voluntarism

and resourcefulness in dealing with poverty that emphasize access to credit, investment in social development sectors, rural infrastructure that is relevant to poverty eradication, and employment generation particularly in the rural areas through self employment, wage employment and agro-based and labour intensive micro-enterprises.

6. They noted the importance of the role of women in strategies aimed at poverty eradication. They also recognized the need to focus on the problems of the poor, living in remote, far-flung, and inaccessible areas that are poorly endowed in resources and the urban poor. While noting the country-specific problems in poverty eradication and the approaches adopted to overcome them, the Member States stressed the need to supplement governmental efforts by grass-roots level NGOs and community organizations through social mobilization strategies that ensure community participation and empowerment of the poor for sustainable development. They laid particular stress on the importance of decentralization of power, participatory planning and ownership of development programmes by the poor. They agreed that steps should be taken to bring about a closer interface between government agencies, NGOs and community organizations engaged in poverty eradication, so as to bring about a convergence in action at all levels, including at the policy and grass-roots levels.

7. The Member States recalled the political commitment unanimously made by the SAARC Heads of State or Government at their Seventh Summit in Dhaka in 1993 and emphatically reiterated their commitment to policies and programmes that would lead to the eradication of poverty by the year 2002. They affirmed their resolve to mobilize resources required for this effort commensurate with the magnitude of the problem, through policies conducive to such resource

mobilization. The new paradigm makes poverty eradication a pre-condition for accelerated growth.

MAXIMIZING PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT OF FULL EMPLOYMENT

8. In fulfillment of the aims and objectives of the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade, the Governments will pursue a course of economic development that is consistent with maximizing productive and freely chosen employment and achieving full employment. For this purpose, it is important to pursue, in the context of patterns of growth and investment, plans that are effectively employment intensive and directed at those sectors with the greatest scope for absorbing labour. Considering that unemployment has taken a global magnitude that, sometimes, is beyond national capacity, international action and assistance are necessary for creating employment opportunities.

9. The Member States will, as appropriate, promote employment by supporting the informal sector, including small-scale and cottage industries and services, especially in rural areas. Measures to be introduced to that end will include: (a) revision of laws and regulations that restrict or otherwise hinder informal sector activities; (b) develop and encourage the development of the informal sector; (c) support of NGOs and other entities that provide technology, business training and access to credit for informal sector undertakings; (d) encouragement to financial and other institutions in opening loan-windows on soft terms to respond to the needs of the informal sector and small business activity. Consistent with national circumstances, the Government of the Member States may support small farm self-employment.

10. Since aquatic, marine and mountain resources are also important sources of income and employment, initiatives will be directed at development of these resources particularly for the poor.

11. Consistent with national circumstances, the Governments will support small-farm self-employment by: (a) promoting the income of small farmers and traditional fishermen, through the enhancement of their productivity and access to markets, and (b) supporting the economic security of small farmers through the diversification of their productive activities, especially non-farm employment. Those policies and programmes, as called for by national circumstances, will include: (i) land reforms (ii) investments in irrigation, rural electrification, transport and communication, and other infrastructure; (iii) improved access to land development and farm credit; (iv) technical extension services; (v) agricultural price stabilization and appropriate support mechanisms; (vi) farmers' training and education; and (vii) promotion of cooperatives.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

12. The Member States stressed the importance of promoting social integration by fostering inclusive, participatory,

just and safe societies for all their people and respecting and accommodating their diversity.

13. The Member States are committed to promoting social integration and participation of all people by fostering

societies that are stable, safe and just. To this end, at the national level, the Member States shall :

a) Promote basic values of respect for pluralism and diversity, tolerance and responsibility, non-violence and solidarity, by encouraging educational systems and communication media to raise people's understanding and awareness of all aspects of social integration;

b) Ensure the protection and full integration of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and individuals, including children, the elderly and people with disabilities;

c) Adopt specific measures to enhance respect for cultural diversity and for the human rights and needs of refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants and migrant workers;

d) Strengthen institutions which enhance social integration, recognizing the central role of the family;

14. They further resolve to work towards fuller equality and equity between men and women so as to make it central in all decision making.

15. A large proportion of Youth are affected by poverty and often exposed to disharmonious family environment and social conflicts. Therefore, they have limited access to

formal and non-formal educational opportunities; inadequate opportunities for market-responsive vocational training and skills development, often resulting in difficulty in securing gainful wage or self-employment.

16. The Meeting recognized that empowerment, particularly of women is enhanced by education. Therefore, strategies that mobilize all sections of the civil society for promotion of literacy and policies that make education attractive to the learner and skill-oriented would receive priority attention. Women's education and the needs of the girl child in this context should be central in all efforts in this direction. The meeting recognized that the Member States' commitment to the primacy of education as a fundamental strategy for social integration would be absolute and total.

MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

17. In considering the implementation of the major social development issues of the World Summit for Social Development, the Governments must recognize and accept that the task of social development, as well as attainment of the goals and targets is, first and foremost, a national responsibility, to be supported by regional and sub-regional, as well as international initiatives as appropriate. In line with the promotion of the concept of decentralization and devolution of administrative and fiscal authority, the ability of local authorities to mobilize resources, should be strengthened and supported consistent with national social development priorities. Appropriate institutional arrangements should be made to carry out effective planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all social development programmes.

18. The convergence of social development efforts should be a common objective of the governments and their agencies, NGOs, voluntary organizations and local communities. Tangible results will be achieved only if they are underpinned by resources sufficient to permit implementation. Therefore, new and innovative sources of financing should be explored, including the possibility of establishing a Special Fund entitled "International Fund for Social Development" to make available additional resources for the implementation of appropriate programmes.

19. The private sector, public and private financial institutions, NGOs, voluntary organizations and local governments and communities should be encouraged to contribute their resources to the cause of social development and participate in the delivery of social services, including by organizing the people, while ensuring effective convergence, transparency and accountability.

20. International and regional mechanisms should be set up which would act as a forum for exchange of information on experiences of countries in the implementation and evaluation of poverty eradication programmes, in the context of the strategies adopted, particularly exchange of information on technologies that are relevant to efforts at poverty eradication. This process could be strengthened by sharing and exchanging relevant studies carried out by institutions, experts and NGOs. The mechanism could be in the form of a three-tier institutional structure that would meet once a year as already adopted by SAARC. The SAARC mechanism is as follows :

i. the group of Secretaries to the Governments in the Ministries/Departments that are essentially concerned with poverty alleviation and social development;

ii. the Finance and Planning Secretaries; and

iii. the Finance and Planning Ministers.

21. On behalf of the visiting delegations, the leader of the Maldives delegation expressed their warm appreciation and deep gratitude to the Government of India for the gracious hospitality extended to them and the excellent arrangements made for the Meeting and also conveyed their sincere thanks and appreciation to Mr. K.R. Venugopal, Secretary, Prime Minister's Office, Government India and to Prof. S.R. Hashim, Principal Advisor, Planning Commission of India, as well as Dr. Sharda Jain for ably guiding the deliberations of the Meeting.

FOOT NOTE

Some of the ideas in this Report have been obtained from the following :

i) Report of the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation; Meeting the Challenge(1992)

ii) Proceedings of the Second SAARC Conference on Children - Colombo Resolution on Children(Colombo, September 1992)

iii) Proceedings of the SAARC Ministerial Conference on Women and Family Health(Kathmandu, November 1993)

iv) Proceedings of the Ministerial Conference on Youth in South Asia(Male, May 1994)

v) Proceedings of the First SAARC Finance/Planning Ministers Meeting(July 1994, Dhaka)

vi) Proceedings of the UN/ESCAP Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference in Preparation for the World Summit for Social Development(October 1994, Manila)

vii) Draft Declaration emerging from the Second PREPCOM for the World Summit for Social Development(New York, August-September, 1994) A/Conf.166/PC/L dated the 22nd November 1994.

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